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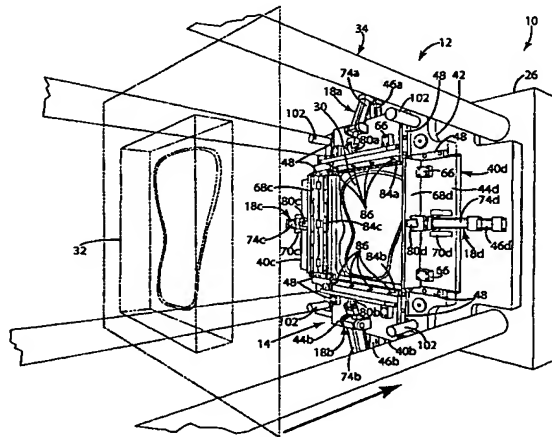
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(54) Title: APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR MOLDING ONTO A STRETCHED BLANK



(57) Abstract: An apparatus and method for molding a component onto a stretched blank. The apparatus includes a stretching assembly mounted adjacent to a first mold part. The stretching assembly includes a plurality of clamp assemblies that grasp the peripheral edge of the blank and a plurality of slide assemblies that move the clamp assemblies away from one another to apply a stretch to the fabric. The apparatus further includes a press for closing a second mold part onto the first mold part while the fabric is held in a stretched condition by the stretching assembly. In one embodiment, the stretching assembly may include a float plate that is movable with respect to the first mold part between a stretch position and a mold position. The apparatus may include a robot with tooling for moving the fabric onto the stretching assembly. The tooling may include a plurality of shot pins that push the fabric off of the tooling onto corresponding fabric pins in the stretching machine. In one embodiment, the apparatus include a stretch measuring device adapted to measure the stretch applied to the fabric.

**Declarations under Rule 4.17:**

- as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii)) for the following designations AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW, ARIPO patent (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE,

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- as to the applicant's entitlement to claim the priority of the earlier application (Rule 4.17(iii)) for all designations
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